

Between amnesia and the «war of memories»: politics of memory in the museum narratives of Ukraine

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This paper seeks to lay out certain critical reflections on social transformations, changes in memory politics and its representation in the Ukrainian museum narratives over the years of independence. In particular, it focuses on the challenges involved in constructing various forms of historical memory, it determines the ways of its representation in current museum narrative practices, illustrates memory politics controversy over the historical issues of the Holodomor of 1932 – 1933, World War II and the Holocaust and reveals the place they occupy in historical memory and museum narratives of different regions of Ukraine. Correlations between historical memory, identity and museum narratives of different regions of Ukraine are highlighted.

Keywords: historical memory; politics of memory; museum narrative

Recent social political changes and transformations in Ukraine have given rise to the growth of research interest in the issues of memory, identity and reconciliation. Ukrainian society experiences the lack of consensus on the problems of common historical past and common historical memory. History and historical memory continue to be subject to political manipulations and are viewed as means of social disintegration, whereas museums may serve important tasks of bringing social understanding and reconciliation as for controversial and sensitive pages of historical memory.

In most contemporary research papers the conceptual terms of «politics of history» and «politics of memory» come to be used by scholars to outline the purposeful selection of historical memory with the aim of its streamlining to achieve political goals. Politics of history implies broader definition, while politics of memory is viewed as its integral component of affirmative function. The definition of «Geschichtspolitik» or «politics of history» was pioneered and scholarly theorized by German researcher Edgar Wolfrum. He suggests it to be a field of activity and an area of politics in which various political actors use history for their specific

political purposes¹. According to findings by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, history as a scientific discipline should be considered in the sense of «second-level historiography» or analytical historiography the reflection of which is oriented towards reconstruction and analysis of the narratives, and not the events that it describes².

The essential part of the politics of history is the «politics of memory». Its objective is to construct the collective memory of a society, often with the use of affirmative and didactic historiography. It results in producing popular science literature, textbooks, teaching historical disciplines, as well as promoting memorial politics to preserve the memory of «significant» events and personalities. Allan Megill asserts that affirmative historiography being part of the memory politics assigns research to projects relevant to current political elites. It lacks criticism of reflections and reminiscences that it collects and traditions that it supports opting for their mythologization³. Memory politics manifests itself in the design of urban landscapes (monuments, commemorative plaques, street names etc), perspectives of museum functioning (defining the mission of museums, developing exhibition concepts, providing relevant representation of the leading narratives), prioritization strategies in archival institution functioning, state support programmes for the film industry, theater and literature. Thus, the memory politics has come to be a crucial mechanism for the society, the nation and the state consolidation.

According to G.Kasianov, “During the Soviet period, the Ukrainian master-narrative was “re-profiled” within the framework of class approach”⁴. The events were aimed at merging all the nations of the Soviet Union into a new community - the “Soviet people”. The very approach was in particular revealed in the museum representation of events. Museum narratives changed significantly after the declaration of independence. However, they still preserved rudiments of the Soviet master narrative marked by the following indicators: marxist interpretation of the “struggle of classes” emphasizing positive role of the “proletariat”; cult of the Soviet leaders (exhibiting artifacts of notable positive role of V. Lenin, J. Stalin and L. Brezhnev); maintaining positive interpretation of the historical role of Russia and the USSR in the development of Ukraine. Quite interesting is the fact that even twenty years after Ukraine had become independent, the central streets in most residential settlements (except for the western region) remained to be named after V. Lenin⁵.

The public resistance of 2014 was directly manifested in the movement for dismantling of the Soviet past symbols. It revealed itself in the processes of de-communisation and the “Leninopad (Leninfall)” or dismantling of the monuments to the Soviet regime leaders in Ukraine. The first monuments to V. Lenin in the West of Ukraine (Chervonohrad, Ternopil, Lviv) were removed earlier in 1990, while in Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Poltava and other regions of the country they were not dismantled until 2014⁶. The lack of a unified politics of memory over the past has brought about strong regional differences, evidenced just as well in museum

¹ WOLFRUM, Edgar. *Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik als Forschungsfelder: Reformation und Bauernkrieg. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik im geteilten Deutschland*. Leipzig : Hg. Scheunemann, 2010, pp. 19-21

² LUHMANN, Niklas. *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main : Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997, pp.103-109

³ MEGILL, Allan. *Historical Knowledge, Historical Error: A Contemporary Guide to Practice*. Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press, 2007, pp. 22.

⁴ KASIANOV, Georhij. *Past continuous: istorychna polityka 1980-х – 2000-х. Ukraina ta susidy*. Kyiv : Laurus, 2018, p. 284..

⁵ HAJDAJ, Oleksanda. *Kamyanyj hist'. Lenin u Centralnij Ukrayini*. Kyiv : K.I.C., 2018, p. 57.

⁶ Ibidem, pp. 52, 66-67.

exhibitions. Having conducted field studies of historical museums in all regions of Ukraine we claim about preservation of the Soviet master narrative or its hybridization with the neo-imperial Russian narrative (in the East and South of Ukraine) and regional manifestations of identity. Public attitude to the Soviet past displays controversy due to regional peculiarities, corruption and difficulties in funding and financial support of museums in Ukraine.

«Mirrors» of memory politics: leading themes in the museums of Ukraine

The research data in the given paper are drawn from current exhibitions displayed in national and regional museums of history and culture. The investigation uses a qualitative study approach to explore narrative changes within the context of memory politics. The domain of field study included the exhibits of 12 museums in all regions of Ukraine: Kyiv, Lviv, Odesa, Poltava, Slaviansk, Kramatorsk, Bakhmut. Within the multiple perspective approach the study utilized the criteria for content analysis of museum narratives. The criteria were developed within the framework of joint Ukrainian-Lithuanian project “Museum as the Space for Polylogues of Dominant and Alternative Narratives: From Theory to Practice” (2018-2019), that the authors of this paper participated in.

The Soviet narrative in modern museums of Ukraine is directly and latently represented in the exhibition cognitive schemes through specific expositions. Though transformed by adding extra elements lately, they emerge to require more thorough research. Slawomir Kapralski claims about selectivity and «erasure/forgetting» in collective memory, which is typical of the Soviet totalitarian model of memory. Erasure can be conscious and directed manipulation, we often experience, when the physical area itself makes up symbolic memory space for many conflict groups due to unequal access to space control means. This phenomenon is exacerbated in case only one homogeneous group remains on the «battlefield» in the physical space. Therefore, the landscape under its control «remembers» what the group wants to be remembered, as well as what it wants to forget, destroy, neglect or remember in a distorted form⁷. This has been clearly traced through a series of subjects that were taboo in the Soviet Union.

A vivid illustration of the memory politics controversy in Ukraine is *the Holodomor of 1932-1933* (man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine). It occupies a special place in communicative memory, exemplifying political influence on memorial processes. The issue of «famine of 1932-1933» has always been inherent in public discourse. Along with Chornobyl disaster and the war in Afghanistan it emerged as one of the issues which facilitated the collapse of Soviet power in Ukraine. As far back as 1970s - the first half of the 1980s the Ukrainian public space, being under the control of the Communist Party (CPU) incorporated discreet debate on whether famine was a social phenomenon at all. After the proclamation of independence of Ukraine, the taboo was gradually removed from the Holodomor theme. In 1993 President Leonid Kravchuk initiated commemoration of the Holodomor victims, although the first memorial objects in remembrance of the victims of the Holodomor appeared in Kyiv region and in Kharkiv in 1988-1989⁸. The Holodomor Remembrance Day to honour the memory of people who had died of starvation in 1932-1933 came to be officially observed only in 1998. Interestingly, in 2004 President L. Kuchma authorized commemorating the victims of

⁷ KAPRALSKYI, Slawomir. Muzei taboru Auschwitz-Birkenau yak polifonichnyi landshaft pamiatyi. In: *Holokost i suchasnist': studiyi v Ukrayini i sviti*, 2015, Vol. 1, Is. 13, p. 77.

⁸ Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. *Den pamiatyi zhertv holodomoru. Metodichni rekomenratsii dlja navchalnykh zakladiv*. [online]. [Accessed 06 July 2019]. Available from: <<http://www.memory.gov.ua/page/den-pamyati-zhertv-golodomoru-metodichni-rekomendatsii-dlya-navchalnikh-zakladiv/>>.

«famines», that is, the victims of deaths from food shortages in 1921-1922, 1932-1933 and in 1946-1947.

Significant efforts to introduce the issue into public discourse have been made by Ukrainian diaspora historians Frank Sysyn, Alexander J. Motyl and American historians Robert Conquest and James Mace⁹. In particular, according to Mace, the Holodomor of 1932-1933 hampered the development of the Ukrainian nation «*harshly and traumatically*», and «*the Nazis do not hold the monopoly on genocide*»¹⁰.



Pict. 1: Bread and Famine – Symbols of the Holodomor of 1932-1933. National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Kyiv. Photo by Roman Kuzmyn.

At the initiative of President Viktor Yushchenko in 2006, the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Parliament) passed the law «On the Holodomor of 1932-1933 in Ukraine», according to Article 1 of which the Holodomor was recognized as «*genocide of the Ukrainian people*». In 2008 the Memorial to victims of famines in Ukraine was opened. It was renamed into the Memorial to Holodomor victims in 2015¹¹. Since then, systematic comprehensive research on the issues related to the Holodomor, among others, problems of collective traumatic memory, has commenced¹².

⁹ SYSYN, Frank. The Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33: The Role of the Ukrainian Diaspora in Research and Public Discussion. In: *Studies in Comparative Genocide*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 1999, pp. 187-196.

¹⁰ PORTNOV, Andrij. *Uprazhneniya s istoriey po-ukrainski*. Moscow : OGI Memorial, 2010, pp.193.

¹¹ Radio Svoboda. *Zakhody do 75-kh rokiv Holodomoru 1932-1933 rokiv*. [online]. 2008. [Accessed 06 July 2019]. Available from: <<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/1947710.html>>.

¹² MAROCHKO, Vasyl. *Holodomor 1932-1933*. Kyiv : Natalia - Brechunenko, 2007, p. 64.

Presidential electoral success of Viktor Yanukovych brought about the shift of Holodomor issue from the epicenter of state politics of memory. Thus, in 2010-2012, commemorating the Holodomor victims was held on a public, not on a state level basis¹³. It was only with the Revolution of Dignity and the launch of Russian-Ukrainian war in 2014 that once again the Holodomor problem was actualized. Thus, in 2015 the Verkhovna Rada condemned the communist and Nazi regimes in a special Act and unlocked access to archival documents of Cheka-NKVD-KGB, facilitating research on Holodomor problems.

The theme of the Holodomor of 1932-1933 is quite strongly represented in the museum narratives of Ukraine. The efforts to «restore» the memory of victims through museum expositions have become typical. Interestingly, museums in the East of Ukraine (Bakhmut, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk) and the South (Odesa), represent the «famine of 1932-1933» as a deviation or «overenforcement» of the Soviet policy of collectivization, or even as personal guilt of Y. Stalin. Instead, in the museums of the Central (Kyiv, Poltava, Dykanka) and Western regions (Lviv) the Holodomor appears as a deliberate act of genocide of the Soviet government against the Ukrainian people. Though food shortage and hunger were not reported in Western regions, since Western Ukrainian lands between the two World Wars were part of Poland.

Moreover, museum expositions keep blatant distortions of history typical of the Soviet period. The deaths of people from starvation are replaced by optimistic paintings of the «victorious move of socialism», joyous and prosperous peasant life. Mass resistance and the war of peasantry against Stalin's power are misconceivingly supplanted by the pictures of unanimous public support of the Soviet collectivization policy, opposed only by minor groups of «kulaks» (wealthy farmers who resisted being forced into collective peasant households) and «party policy evaders»¹⁴. As a result, museums exhibit whimsically fused portraiture of the Holodomor artifacts demonstrating successful collectivization policy and «prompt attack on a class enemy», and displaying photos of «collective agricultural competition winners» and the plundered peasants (Odesa, Bakhmut, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Poltava, Dikanka). The politics of memory within the period of Independence has led to consequential references about Holodomor victims. But quite often, they constitute a formal representation of materials having little in common with the regional history, which the museums are aimed to represent. For example, according to famine death toll estimates in Sloviansk district, more people (15 %) have been reported to have died of starvation in urban areas than in rural ones (13.5%), which is a paradox. The exposition on the Holodomor events of 1932-1933 in the museum of Kramatorsk city history exhibits the campaign poster by Dmitry Moor dated 1921, calling for help to those who suffered from food shortages in Volga region of the Russian Empire in 1921-1923. Alongside, there are displayed photos of Liudmyla Shylo's family, who all died of starvation in Sumy region located about 300 km far from Kramatorsk. The Poltava Local Lore Museum named after Vasyl Krychevskyi displays photos of collective farming labour heroes assembly (1933), but it does not keep any mention of Holodomor despite the fact that in Poltava region the level of infant mortality reached 66% of the total number of victims,

¹³ Istorychna Pravda. *Rada ne zakhotila vidzpnachaty yurilei Slipoho, Mazepy i Holodomoru* [online]. 2011. [Accessed 06 July 2019]. Available from: <<http://www.istpravda.com.ua/short/2011/11/16/62396/>>.

¹⁴ HRYNEVYCH, Lidija. Holod 1932-1933 u publichnii kulturi pamiatni ta suspilnii svidomosti v Ukrainsi. In: *Problemy istorii Ukrayiny*. Kyiv, 2007, p. 389.

whereas in other regions of the Ukrainian SSR it was 40 %.¹⁵ Such museum expositions generate ambivalent attitudes towards the events of the Holodomor of 1932-1933.

Controversial memory of World War II (1939-1945) in the museum narratives

The list of legal acts issued by the Ukrainian authorities on commemoration of important historical dates is undoubtedly headed by those related to World War II. This global destructive conflict has remained one of the most controversial pages in the history of Ukraine. Until 2014, the official discourse had been dominated by the definitions of «The Great Patriotic War», «Victory» and others, which clearly marked the Soviet interpretational conception of that period. According to the estimates by Svitlana Nabok, the concept of «The Great Patriotic War» had been used more than 200 times in the normative legal acts until 2013, which appeared to be an absolute frontrunner¹⁶. But at the same time, it had virtually been the only tribute to the state-level victory (always written with the capital letter - «Victory») for many years, with a view to the entire arsenal of historical politics tools¹⁷. Such symbolic construct was often used along with the concepts of «fascism», «occupation», «feat», «people-winners», which were characteristic of the Soviet politics of memory unremittingly tolerated in the post-Soviet space.

The construction of Ukrainian historical memory of World War II has been complicated by inconsistent support of various memory politics models, often counter-contradictory and controversial to the previous politics of memory during the serving of a number of Ukrainian presidents. The peculiar feature of implementing the politics of memory in Ukraine is the revision of approaches to interpreting the Second World War events. Alterations emerge practically every five years and vary from support of the post-Soviet model to a nationally centered one and vice versa. In particular, Tatiana Zhurzhenko observes that the proclamation of independence of Ukraine opened space for pluralization and nationalization of public memory¹⁸. Pluralization of memory was conditioned by democratization processes in the 1990s and promoted the articulation of their own versions of the past by various social groups, including the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) veterans, descendants of the Holocaust victims, victims of Stalin repressions, and the former ostarbeiter. Instead, the nationalization of memory is associated with reappraisal of the Soviet narrative about the «Great Patriotic War» and the construction of new national identities and national «memory cultures» by post-Soviet elites¹⁹.

Nevertheless, the memory of «joint victory» remains to stand as an important symbolic resource in demand by various political authorities both at the regional and national levels. It has been employed in the Ukrainian-Russian relations to legitimize post-Soviet integration projects as well as «strategic partnership» of the two countries²⁰. Interpretation of the history of World War II and estimation of its significance for Ukraine have been directly related to post-colonial search for national identity and geopolitical choice between Russia and the West²¹.

¹⁵ PETRENKO, Stepan. Holod 1932-1933 rr. na Poltavshchyni ochyma suchasnykiv. In: *Bulletin of the Lviv Polytechnic National University*. Lviv: State and Army, 2003, p. 304.

¹⁶ NABOK, Svitlana. *Derzhava i polityka pamyati: dosvid chotyrokh Prezydentiv Ukrayiny*. In: SHAPOVAL, Jurij. (Ed.). *Kultura istorychnoi pamyati: yevropeiskyyi ta ukrainskyi dosvid*, Kyiv : IPIEND, 2013, p. 255.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 256.

¹⁸ ZHURZHENKO, Tetjana. Chuzha viina chy spilna Peremoha. Nacionalizaciia pamiati pro Druhu svitovu viinu na ukraino-rosiiskomu prykordonni. In: *Ukraina moderna*, 2011, Vol.18, p. 101.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p.101.

²⁰ Ibidem, pp.103-104.

²¹ Ibidem, pp.102-103.

A leading theme of the museums of Ukraine, except for those in Western regions, is the construct of the «Great Patriotic War», which has been preserved practically unrevised since the Soviet Union period. Following the «Soviet canon», in the museums of Donbas (Bakhmut, Sloviansk, Kramatorsk), Poltava, Odesa, the exposition on the World War II events opens with the symbols of unexpected attack of Nazi Germany on the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941: the Luftwaffe airplanes, aviation bombs, loudspeakers, reports of Nazi Germany attack, mobilization for the Red Army. Indispensable attributes are the landscapes of the ruined peaceful life and the massive patriotic rise of the «Soviet people» in defense of the USSR. Expositions are richfully characterized by preserving dominance of the Soviet press and cartoons relaying ideological Soviet clichés to visitors and glorifying the «sacred war». Episodic changes have only been found in Kyiv National Museum of History of Ukraine in World War II and Odesa Local Lore and History Museum wherein interpretations of the «Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact», the German-Soviet parade in Brest in 1939 and «liberation» of western Ukrainian lands in 1939-1940 are exposed. Therefore, a peculiar prologue to the main exposition has been framed.

Indispensable stories of such a museum narrative are the heroic fighting force of the Red Army, brutal Nazi occupation regime, «liberation» and the heroic way to «Victory». This scheme has been noticed in almost all the museums visited. Lack of the narrative redefinition has been evidenced by the preserved episodes of combat operations outside Ukraine, in Belarus, Russia, the countries of Eastern Europe. The episodes of the defense of the Brest Fortress, the Battle of Moscow, the Siege of Leningrad, the Battles of Stalingrad and Kursk attract visitors to a «broad» Soviet grand-narrative.

Special attention should be paid to the other two «representative» episodes related to local partisan clandestine movement and cruelty of the occupation regime. It is exactly through local manifestations, as in the most instances of only the Soviet partisan resistance, that the grand narrative of the «Great Patriotic War» has been bound up with local stories. Although there have been noticed certain positive attempts to reshape the homogeneous interpretation. For example, within the context of Soviet resistance movement, the Kramatorsk Museum of City History expositions feature the existence of a local clandestine group of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) without specifying the details of its activities and personal membership. At the same time, only the Kyiv National Museum of History of Ukraine in World War II and the Kyiv National Museum of History of Ukraine, as well as the Lviv Museum of the Liberation Struggle of Ukraine display particular exhibitions dedicated to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) struggle. This is regarded to be an alternative to dominance of Soviet partisan movement in the Ukrainian museum narrative.

The Holocaust: between dissemblance and marginalization

Another tragic historical issue for the Ukrainian society is the Holocaust, which, for various reasons, has been silenced by memory politics agents. American historian Timothy Snyder's thesis is that the regions where mass killings of noncombatants were committed on the eve of and during World War II are to be named «Bloodlands», «*although the bloodlands in those years became a battlefield, all those people were victims of the politics of destruction, not military actions*»²². The Holocaust is a vivid example of the politics of extermination, which took lives of approximately between 900 thousand and 1.5 million people in Ukraine²³. During the Soviet period, regardless

²² SNYDER. Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York : Basic Books, 2012, p. 7.

²³ KASIANOV, ref. 4, p. 284.

of detailed study of genocide evidence on Soviet territory, the term «Holocaust» was not acknowledged by special commission authorities to denote the mass extermination of Jewish population during World War II²⁴. General terms, as «peaceful residents», «Soviet people» and none of the ethnic and religious definitions were applied to denote mass executions.

Proclamation of independence encouraged reapproaching of the Holocaust theme. Thus, in September 1991, President Leonid Kravchuk made emotional speech in Babyn Yar²⁵, and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted a decree of September 10, 1991 «On measures regarding the 50th anniversary of the Babyn Yar tragedy», which legitimized commemorating the «mass extermination of Soviet citizens, in particular of Jewish nationality by German fascist invaders...»²⁶. Steps towards engaging in a constructive Ukrainian-Jewish dialogue could be exemplified by opening the monument to priest Omelian Kovch in Lviv in 2012, who had saved both Ukrainians and Jews during World War II, as well as by partial restoration of the Jewish cemetery and the establishment of the Lviv Ghetto Victims Memorial²⁷.

The theme of the Jewish ethnic group genocide is often revealed in museum narratives, precisely through the prism of Nazi repressions and «sufferings of the Soviet people» from «German barbarism», as, for example, in Bakhmut²⁸. Such interpretation is an expressive relic of the Soviet memory narrative, that Ukrainian museum exhibitions are unfortunately dominated by²⁹. The Holocaust issue is not the key issue of museum exhibitions and is often integrated with other occupation stories: terror against Red Army soldiers as prisoners of war, rigorous occupation policy, forced labor resettlement, etc. Moreover, despite the fact that since 2011 the memory of Holocaust victims has been honoured at the governmental level, the tragedy has not been practically exposed as an independent theme in the Ukrainian museums. Of all the museums having been visited the only particular exhibition is displayed in the Industrial Museum of Artemivsk Champagne Wines Factory. The alabaster tunnels of the factory were places where in December 1941-January 1942 the German occupation troops murdered Jews³⁰ referred to as «Soviet citizens» in modern museum narrative. The National Museum of World War II in Kyiv in its hall № 7 displays the exhibition entitled “The occupation regime on the territory of Ukraine”, which features artifacts and documents dedicated to persecution of Jews in Kyiv, Lutsk, Lviv, Boryslav, Vinnytsia region, as well as shootings in September-October 1941 in Babyn Yar, known as the “place of memory” of the Holocaust in Ukraine. The memorial in Babyn Yar acquired the status of a national one in 2010. Since then it has become the place where the ceremonies of Holocaust victims commemoration by the Ukrainian officials (L. Kravchuk, L. Kuchma, V. Yushchenko, P. Poroshenko) are held³¹. Further, certain mentions of the Holocaust within the context of the Nazi occupation regime are found in the Bakhmut Museum of Local Lore and the Poltava Local Lore Museum named after V. Krychevskyi, featuring the map of ghetto locations in the area. Quite impressive is the fact that the photo album published by the Museum of World War II in Kiev in 2004 contains no mention of the

²⁴ LEVITAS, Feliks. *Holocaust: pamiat, fakty, dokumenty*. In: SHAPOVAL, Jurij. (Ed.). *Kultura istorychnoi pamyati: yevreyskiy ta ukrainskiy dosvid*. Kyiv: IPIEND, 2013, p. 170-171.

²⁵ Ibidem, p. 174.

²⁶ Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. *Pro zaxody u zvyazku z 50-lichchym tragediyi Babynogo Yaru*, 10.09.1991, № 192.

²⁷ LEVITAS, ref. 24, p.81.

²⁸ KAPRALSKYI, ref. 7, pp.79-80, 84.

²⁹ KASIANOV, ref. 4, p.284.

³⁰ TATARINOV, Serhij. FEDOTOV, Sergei. *Shtetl-Bakhmut - fenomen evreiskogo naroda v Donbase*. Kharkiv: Slovo, 2013, pp. 133-135.

³¹ KASIANOV, ref. 4, p.285.

Holocaust in Ukraine³². Moreover, it appears as paradoxical though true that in the second decade of the twenty-first century the exhibitions feature antisemitic propaganda leaflets (Sloviansk, Poltava), characteristic of the Soviet policy during the Cold War period. While at the same time, numerous museums have no mention of the extermination of the Jewish people.



Pict. 2: Part of the exhibition on the Nazi occupation regime in Ukraine (1941-1944).

National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II, Kyiv. Photo: Roman Kuzmyn.

At the regional level, the problem of the Holocaust comes to get embedded in collective memory provided there is an active local Jewish community, as it is exemplified in Odessa. The city was the second one, following Moscow, by the number of Jewish population in the Soviet Union and the largest Soviet center of Jewish community in the territories occupied by Germany and its allies. Odessa Local Lore and History Museum holds the exhibition related to the period of World War II. Though being spaced in a separate large room, it virtually ignores the Jewish genocide theme, whereas scholarly observations of such problem go far back to 2006³³. And the state of affairs turns out to be even more miserable when it comes to have been noted that Jewish population were evacuated from Northern Bukovina, Bessarabia and Romania, where about 100 thousand people were murdered, to Transnistria centered in Odessa. The situation in Odessa improved only after the

Museum of The Holocaust - Victims of fascism was opened by the Jewish community in 2009.³⁴

Since then, the museum has been actively replenished. In particular, a layout of the ghetto located in Slobidka (residential area of Odessa) appeared on display in 2017³⁵.

ATO: challenges of harsh modern times

Despite all the complexities and contradictions of the memory landscape in Ukraine, since 2014, the theme has appeared which, regardless of the region, serves as a unifying motive for the museum narrative. The theme unveils the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict of 2014-2018, or as it is frequently outlined, the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the East of Ukraine (renamed into Joint Forces Operation). In recent years, such thematic exhibitions have appeared in the Museum of World War II and the National Museum of History of Ukraine in Kiev, the

³² Memorialnyj kompleks «Nacionalnyj muzej istoriji Velykoyi Vitchyznyanoj vijny 1941-1945 rokiv». [Photo album], Kyiv: Archetype, 2004. p. 92.

³³ RASHKOVETSKIY, Mikhail. Tema Holokosta v Muzee istorii evreev Odessy. In: RASHKOVETSKIY, Mikhail (ed.) *Istoriya Holokosta v Odesskom regione*. Odessa : Nehocvant, 2006, p. 118-119.

³⁴ CHECH, Lera. *V Odesse otmetili godovschinu otkrytiya muzeya Holokosta*. [Photoreport]. 2010. [Accessed 06 July 2019]. Available from: <<https://reporter-ua.com/2010/06/23/fotoreportazh-v-odesse-otmetili-godovshchinu-otkrytiya-muzeya-holokosta/>>. [in Russian].

³⁵ UNIAN. *V Odesskom muzee Holokosta pojavilsya maket getto v miniatyre*. [online]. 2017. [Accessed 06 July 2019]. Available from: <<https://religions.unian.net/judaism/2266839-v-odesskom-muzee-holokosta-pojavilsya-maket-getto-v-miniatyre-foto.html/>>.

Museums of Local Lore and History in Odesa and Poltava, as well as in Donbas museums (Bakhmut, Sloviansk and Kramatorsk). The tendency confirms implementation of the politics of memory for the collective memory mobilization by constructing a single museum narrative on contemporary events.

Therefore, the defining feature of the politics of memory in Ukraine is the existence of contradictions and conflicts in the post-Soviet historical memory. Over the years of independence, the political elites have failed to form a single «canon» of important state events and personalities, which is evident in the museum exhibition analysis. The lack of a long-term strategy in planning and systematic implementation of the politics of memory leads to periodic changes in the vector of state historical policy. The Soviet narrative is claimed to be dominant in the museums of all levels, especially, with reference to the period of the 20th century, except for the West of Ukraine, where it is displaced by nationalistic narrative. Victimized historical events such as the Holodomor, the Holocaust, and the Volyn tragedy often remain formal attributes of regional museum exhibitions that are left uninterpreted on the basis of local material. Thus, we can conclude that fragmentation and inconsistency in memory politics construction in the third decade of independence of Ukraine have caused lacunae in the museum narrative, that will have to be eliminated in the years to come.



Pict. 3: Munition fragments featured in the installation exhibiting the Anti-Terrorist Operation in the East of Ukraine.
National Museum of the History of Ukraine, Kyiv.
Photo: Roman Kuzmyn.

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